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GHOST RIDER
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AARON • BOSCHI • BROWN

# GHOST RIDER

To save a loved one, motorcycle stuntman Johnny Blaze sold his soul to the devil. The deal turned out poorly for Johnny, with his surrogate father dying anyway, as Johnny was cursed to live life as the Ghost Rider, a vicious spirit that exists only to mete out vengeance.

Recently, Johnny discovered that his life as the Ghost Rider was actually the doing of the rogue angel, Zadkiel. His old girlfriend Roxanne had made a deal with Zadkiel to save Johnny from an eternity in hell. In exchange, Johnny was forced to become the Ghost Rider, an Angel of Vengeance. Since then, Zadkiel has used Johnny as a pawn in his war against heaven, and his attempt to overthrow God himself. Having just learned all this, Johnny hopes to storm the gates of heaven, looking for revenge...

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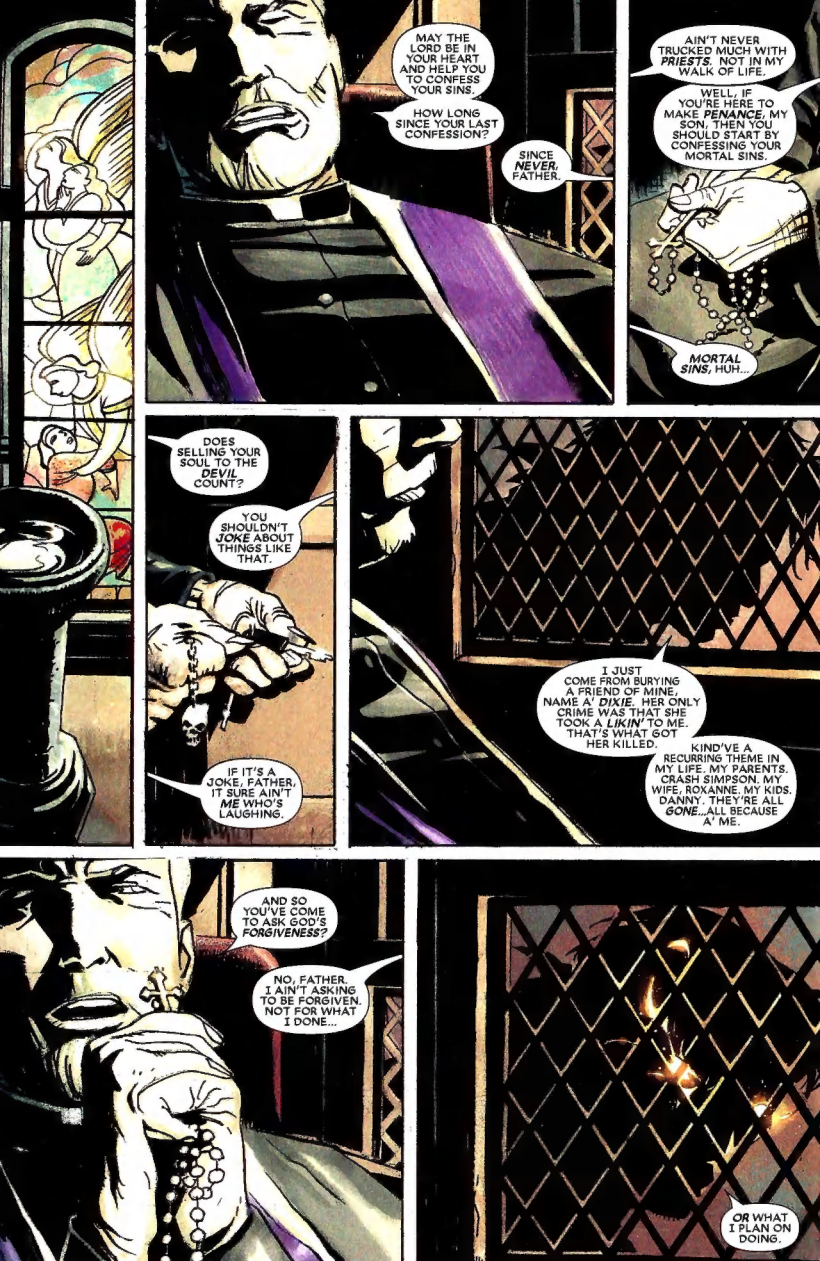

MAY THE LORD BE IN YOUR HEART AND HELP YOU TO CONFESS YOUR SINS.
HOW LONG SINCE YOUR LAST CONFESSION?
SINCE *NEVER*, FATHER.
AIN'T NEVER TRUCKED MUCH WITH *PRIESTS*. NOT IN MY WALK OF LIFE.
WELL, IF YOU'RE HERE TO MAKE *PENANCE*, MY SON, THEN YOU SHOULD START BY CONFESSING YOUR MORTAL SINS.
*MORTAL SINS*, HUH...
DOES SELLING YOUR SOUL TO THE *DEVIL* COUNT?
YOU SHOULDN'T *JOKE* ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT.
IF IT'S A JOKE, FATHER, IT SURE AIN'T *ME* WHO'S LAUGHING.
I JUST COME FROM BURYING A FRIEND OF MINE, NAME A' *DIXIE*. HER ONLY CRIME WAS THAT SHE TOOK A *LIKIN'* TO ME. THAT'S WHAT GOT HER KILLED.
KIND'VE A RECURRING THEME IN MY LIFE. MY PARENTS. CRASH SIMPSON. MY WIFE, ROXANNE. MY KIDS. DANNY. THEY'RE ALL *GONE*...ALL BECAUSE A' ME.
AND SO YOU'VE COME TO ASK GOD'S *FORGIVENESS*?
NO, FATHER. I AIN'T ASKING TO BE FORGIVEN. NOT FOR WHAT I DONE...
*OR* WHAT I PLAN ON DOING.

SEE, FATHER, I BEAT THE DEVIL. SENT HIM BACK TO HELL WITH HIS TAIL BETWEEN HIS LEGS.
YOU THINK THAT'D BE IT, RIGHT? FINALLY, A BIG WIN FOR OL' JOHNNY. FINALLY, A CHANCE TO PUT ONE OVER ON HIM THAT SCREWED ME.
BUT NO. TURNS OUT THE DEVIL WASN'T ALONE WHEN HE TURNED MY LIFE INTO A HORROR SHOW. HE HAD HELP FROM SOME BOYS UPSTAIRS.

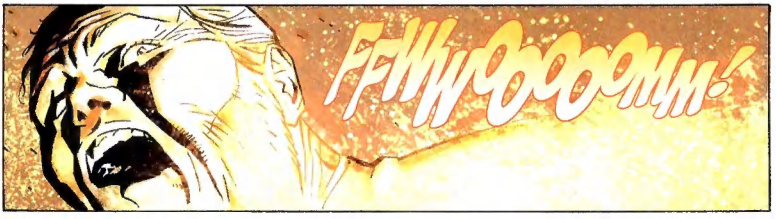
YOU KNOW WHO I MEAN, FATHER. THE ONES WITH THE HALOS AND THE GOLDEN HARPS.
YOU SPEAK BLASPHEMY.
OH, I'M FLUENT AS HELL IN IT, FATHER.
BUT I DIDN'T COME HERE TO PLAY THE DOZENS WITH YA. ALL I WANNA KNOW IS...

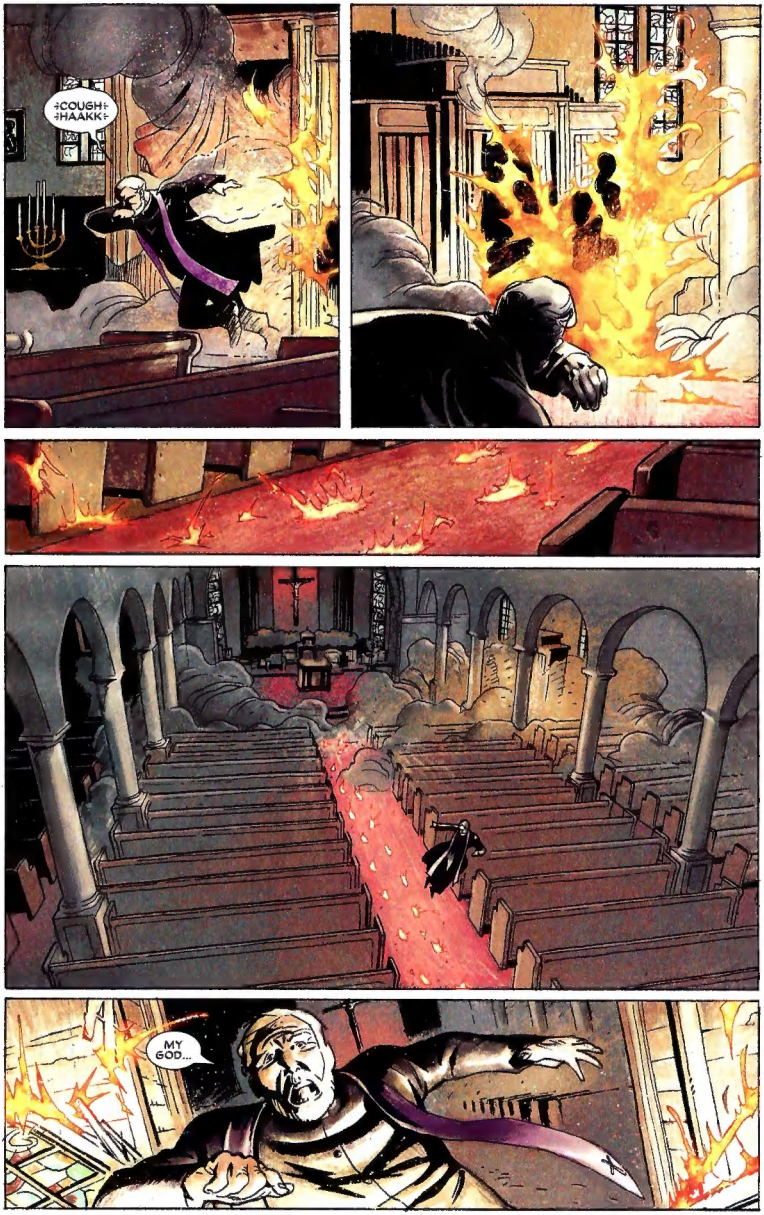
HOW IN THE HELL DO I GET TO HEAVEN?

THE PATH TO SALVATION BEGINS WHEN YOU...WHEN YOU HUMBLE YOURSELF BEFORE GOD AND ASK HIS FORGIVENESS.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I AIN'T INTERESTED IN NO SALVATION.
THE ANGEL WHO DID THIS TO ME... HIS NAME IS ZADKIEL.
IF YOU GOT ANY HOTLINE TO THE PEARLY GATES, PADRE, I WANT YOU TO TELL HIM I'M COMING, YA HEAR?

TELL HIM VENGEANCE IS COMING.


FFWWOOOOMM!


+COUGH+
+HAAAK+
MY GOD...

# HELL-BENT & HEAVEN-BOUND
## PART ONE

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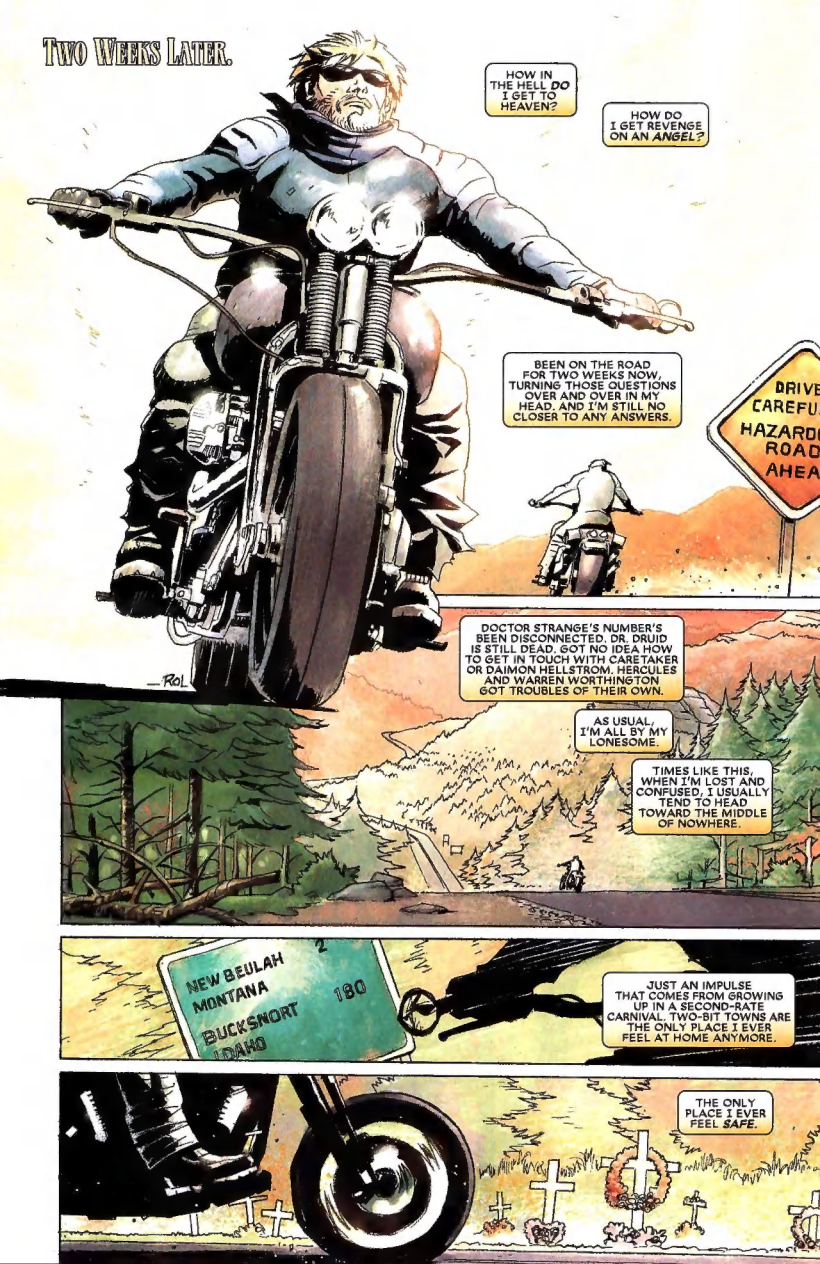
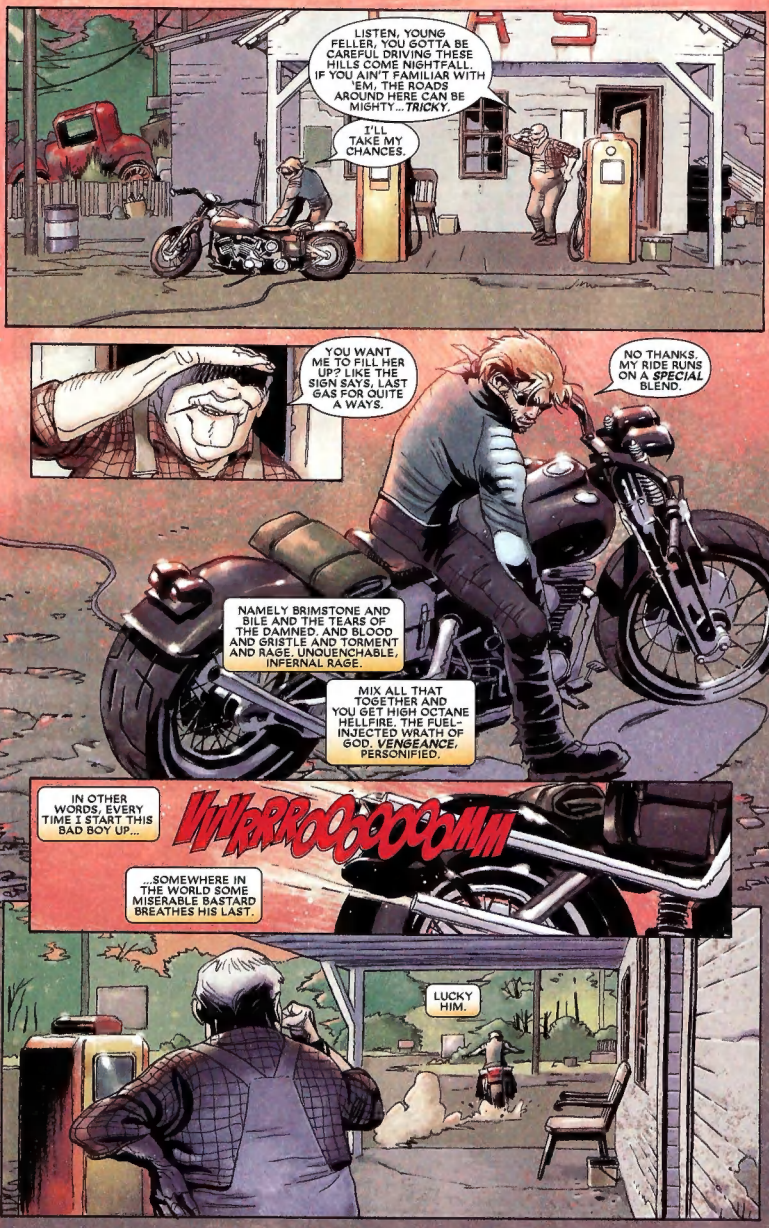

TWO WEEKS LATER.
HOW IN THE HELL DO I GET TO HEAVEN?
HOW DO I GET REVENGE ON AN ANGEL?
BEEN ON THE ROAD FOR TWO WEEKS NOW, TURNING THOSE QUESTIONS OVER AND OVER IN MY HEAD. AND I'M STILL NO CLOSER TO ANY ANSWERS.
DRIVE CAREFU
HAZARDO ROAD AHEA
DOCTOR STRANGE'S NUMBER'S BEEN DISCONNECTED. DR. DRUID IS STILL DEAD. GOT NO IDEA HOW TO GET IN TOUCH WITH CARETAKER OR DAIMON HELLSTROM. HERCULES AND WARREN WORTHINGTON GOT TROUBLES OF THEIR OWN.
AS USUAL, I'M ALL BY MY LONESOME.
TIMES LIKE THIS, WHEN I'M LOST AND CONFUSED, I USUALLY TEND TO HEAD TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.
NEW BEULAH 2
MONTANA
BUCKSNORT 180
IDAHO
JUST AN IMPULSE THAT COMES FROM GROWING UP IN A SECOND-RATE CARNIVAL. TWO-BIT TOWNS ARE THE ONLY PLACE I EVER FEEL AT HOME ANYMORE.
THE ONLY PLACE I EVER FEEL SAFE.

ENERGY DRINKS AND BEEF JERKY...
LAST GAS 1000 MILES
GAS
NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A *BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS!* WHERE YA HEADED?
*HEAVEN*, IF I CAN GET THERE.
HA! I HEAR YA. *TOUGH* GOINGS SOMETIMES, AIN'T IT?
TOUGH KNOWING WHERE TO START.
WELL, YOU ALWAYS START BY GETTIN' THE DEVIL OFF YOUR BACK.
YEAH, I DONE THAT ALREADY.
AFTER THAT, YOU JUST GOTTA LAY YOUR BURDENS DOWN BEFORE THE LORD.
MAYBE I'LL GIVE THAT A TRY. THANKS.
WE GOT US A LOCAL BOY WHO SAYS HE BEEN TO HEAVEN. CAME BACK ALL SCARED SILLY.
YA DON'T SAY.
I TELL YA, BEATS ALL I EVER SEEN...
ESH SANDWICHES
A GROWN MAN AFRAID OF *ANGELS*.

WHAT'D YOU SAY?
LOCAL BOY, *LUCAS*, HAD A HEART ATTACK AND WAS DEAD FOR ABOUT A MINUTE BEFORE THE PARAMEDICS BROUGHT HIM BACK.
SAYS THAT WHILE HE WAS DEAD HE HAD ONE A' THEM THERE DEALS WHERE YA FLOAT UP OUTTA YOUR BODY AND GO ON UP TO HEAVEN.
BUT INSTEAD OF BEING ALL PEACEFUL AND WHATNOT, THE BOY SAYS IT WAS *TERRIFYING*. ON ACCOUNT A' THE ANGELS.
THE FOOL'S SCARED TO DEATH OF ANGELS NOW, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE THAT.
WHERE CAN I FIND THIS *LUCAS* FELLA?
THEY GOT HIM AT THE HOSPITAL, JUST OUTSIDE A' TOWN.
HEY! WAIT!


LISTEN, YOUNG FELLER, YOU GOTTA BE CAREFUL DRIVING THESE HILLS COME NIGHTFALL. IF YOU AIN'T FAMILIAR WITH 'EM, THE ROADS AROUND HERE CAN BE MIGHTY... TRICKY.
I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES.
YOU WANT ME TO FILL HER UP? LIKE THE SIGN SAYS, LAST GAS FOR QUITE A WAYS.
NO THANKS. MY RIDE RUNS ON A SPECIAL BLEND.
NAMELY BRIMSTONE AND BILE AND THE TEARS OF THE DAMNED. AND BLOOD AND GRISTLE AND TORMENT AND RAGE. UNQUENCHABLE, INFERNAL RAGE.
MIX ALL THAT TOGETHER AND YOU GET HIGH OCTANE HELLFIRE. THE FUEL-INJECTED WRATH OF GOD. VENGEANCE, PERSONIFIED.
IN OTHER WORDS, EVERY TIME I START THIS BAD BOY UP...
VVVRRROOOOOOMM
...SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD SOME MISERABLE BASTARD BREATHES HIS LAST.
LUCKY HIM.

LATER...
ULAH HOSPITAL
EXCUSE ME...
CAN I HELP YOU?
I'M LOOKING FOR THE BOY NAMED LUCAS. THE ONE WHO CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD.
ARE YOU FAMILY?
JUST NEED TO ASK HIM A COUPLE QUESTIONS IS ALL.
I'M SORRY, SIR, BUT I CAN'T ALLOW THAT UNLESS YOU'RE FAMILY.
FIVE MINUTES. I JUST NEED TO KNOW WHAT HE SAW.
I'LL GIVE YA FIVE SECONDS TO GET THE HELL OUTTA MY HOSPITAL.

I'M SORRY, MADAM, HE JUST---
SHUT UP, NAOMI. LET ME HANDLE THIS.
YOU, SHAGGY. WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE? YOU WANT ME TO CALL THE COPS?
LADY, YOU AIN'T GOT ENOUGH COPS IN YOUR WHOLE DAMN STATE TO KEEP ME FROM BURNING THIS PLACE TO THE GROUND IF I DON'T GET WHAT I WANT.
IF YOU FEEL LIKE SPENDING THE NEXT THREE DAYS SO JACKED UP ON THORAZINE THAT YOU'RE SUCKING YOUR THUMB AND BEGGING FOR MOMMY, THEN YOU JUST GO RIGHT AHEAD AND TRY IT, MY FRIEND.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH.
AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, I DON'T CARE.
GET OUT. NOW.

I'VE ONE TOE TO TOE WITH THE HULK, I'VE KICKED THE DEVIL'S ASS A THOUSAND TIMES OVER.
WHO THE HELL DOES THIS OLD BROAD THINK SHE IS?
HEY, WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU--
I WARNED YOU, WOMAN.
FFOOOOOOSH!
AAARRRRGGGHHH!
AAARRRRGGGHH!

...
I'M WAITING...
YOU'RE LUCKY, WOMAN. YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW CLOSE YOU CAME TO HELL TONIGHT.
YEAH YEAH, WHATEVER YOU SAY.
AND DON'T COME BACK UNLESS YOU'RE DISEASED OR BLEEDING PROFUSELY!
OH MY...THAT WAS...
WOW.
WHERE YOU FROM AGAIN, NAOMI?
BUCKSNORT, MA'AM.
SO YOU'RE A CITY GIRL. WELL, OUT HERE IN THE BOONIES WE GET ALL KINDS OF CRACKPOTS WANDERING IN. YOU JUST GOTTA SHOW 'EM WHO'S BOSS.
GIVE 'EM A LITTLE SLAP ON THE NOSE AND THEY GO SCAMPERING OFF LIKE WOUNDED MUTTS, EVERY TIME.

KRRAAASHH!
WELL... MOST EVERY TIME.

AIIAIIIIEEEEEE!
AAAAHH!
VVRROOOOOOMMMM

VVVV

LISTEN, I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BLAZE, AND I KNOW WHY YOU'VE COME.
JUST GET ME AWAY FROM HERE, AND I'LL TELL YOU WHATEVER YOU WANNA KNOW.
HOW FAST CAN THIS BIKE OF YOURS GO?
FASTER THAN HELL.
WELL, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, MAN...
BUT IT AIN'T HELL I'M WORRIED ABOUT.

OH MY GOD...DID WE... DID ANYONE...
DID ANYONE GET HIS *LICENSE PLATE NUMBER?*

THE POLICE ARE ON THEIR WAY, AREN'T THEY?
NO, POLICE.
TRISH, ROUND UP THE GIRLS.
YES, MA'AM.

TELL 'EM WE'RE GOING TO *CODE RED.*

CLICK

TIME TO SHOW OUR LORD *ZADKIEL* HOW MUCH WE LOVE HIM.

EVERYBODY GRAB ALL YOU CAN CARRY.
MY GOD, WHAT'S GOING ON? ALL THESE GUNS...
NAOMI, GO BRING THE CAR AROUND.
I'M...I'M DRIVING?
NO, HONEY, I AM.
CHA-CHAKK
I'M SURE YOU'RE A FINE DRIVER AND ALL, BUT COME NIGHTFALL, THE ROADS AROUND HERE CAN GET KINDA...

"...TRICKY."
WHERE THE HELL *ARE* WE?
SIGN SAID "*NEW BEULAH.*"
WHERE THE HELL IS *THAT?*
I'M LOOKING.
CAN YOU FIND IT ON THE MAP?
I'M *LOOKING!*
DAMMIT. I BET WE MISSED THE STUPID TURN. WE'RE GONNA BE LATE AS HELL AND THE RESORT'S GONNA CANCEL OUR RESERVATION, I JUST KNOW IT.
SCREW IT. I'M TURNING AROUND.
NO, WAIT. JUST *HOLD ON.* LET ME FIGURE OUT WHERE WE ARE.
YOU JUST WATCH THE DAMN *ROAD.*

SCHRACK!
WHAT THE HELL?!
THOOM!
KKRAAAASH

GAAA... HELLO? IS ANYBODY THERE?
I CAN'T FEEL MY LEGS. HELLO?
HELLO, IS...
OH MY G--
AAHEEIAIA! AAARRRRGGHH!
UHHH
AAAA
HEH HEH HEH.
WELL, LOOKIE THERE...MY MY MY...

AIN'T YOU A PRETTY SIGHT.
NEXT ISSUE:
MACHINE GUN NURSES-A-GO-GO
OR
A Montana Mountain Murder Mystery
Starring Deputy Kowalski

# GHOST WRITERS

So Ghost Rider's an angel now, huh?

LAME.

If that was your reaction upon first hearing the news about the character's newest origin, you probably weren't alone. But if you thought for a second that GHOST RIDER was about to lose its edge, that it was going from Faust meets Road Warrior to something more along the lines of "Highway to Heaven," well, I'm here to tell ya, friend, that you were terribly mistaken.

My name's Jason Aaron and I'm the newest writer to chronicle the adventures of America's favorite flame-headed, bike-riding bad ass. If you've read any of my previous work, like *The Other Side* and *Scalped* for Vertigo or my various issues of WOLVERINE, you'll know that my writing has never been confused with anything remotely "touchy feeling" or "family friendly." Unless the name of your family happens to be Manson. I like my heroes flawed and tortured and prone to violent outbursts. And within the confines of the Marvel Universe, the heroes don't get much more flawed or tortured than Johnny Blaze.

The first time I ever saw Blaze was on the cover of issue #32 of the original series, way back in 1978. On that cover, we see Ghost Rider all in flames and dangling from a noose, being hanged by the black-clad Bounty Hunter and several skeletons wearing cowboy hats, a couple of them angrily shaking their fists in the air. It is, quite possibly, the greatest piece of art ever drawn by anyone anywhere in all the history of the world.

I've been a fan of Ol' Flamehead ever since.

Along the way, I've loved the team-ups with the Son of Satan and the Punisher. The love triangle with Roxanne Simpson and Karen Page. The sheer strangeness of that short-lived superteam, The Champions. The battles against the Scarecrow. The Orb. Deathwatch and his ninjas. The writing of Michael Fleisher and Garth Ennis. The art of Mike Ploog and Mark Texeira. The chains and spikes and gravity-defying motorcycle stunts. The Penance Stares. The fire that's "cold to the touch…meant to scald the soul, not the body." The hellish beatdowns. The fuel-injected fury.

It's true, the Ghost Rider will be done with the devil for awhile. He'll be moving on. But that doesn't mean his battles will be getting any easier. Quite the contrary, in fact. Going back to the GHOST RIDER: ROAD TO DAMNATION mini-series by Garth Ennis and Clayton Crain that helped to launch this latest version of the Spirit of Vengeance, one of the themes that's proved most interesting to me is the idea that there's often a thin line separating the demons of hell from the angels of heaven. And when I say angels, I'm not talking about chubby little cherubs with rosy cheeks. Oh no. I mean the winged warriors with flaming swords. The mysterious, unearthly beings with the power to level cities and wipe out armies. Turns out, it's an angel that's been manipulating Blaze all along. That's responsible for turning his life into a long-running horror show. The angel's name is Zadkiel and trust me when I say, he's going to earn his spot among Ghost Rider's rogues gallery. Just you wait.

Sure, the devil was always a formidable opponent for Ghost Rider, but remember, in the war for heaven, the devil and his demons were the definite losers. They were soundly defeated and cast down into hell. Now Blaze is going after the winners in that war, and if he thought the devil was tough, he ain't seen nothing yet.

So again, if you thought for a second that we were about to soften things up around here or take them down a notch from where they've been before, you're dead wrong, my friend. Just wait until you get a load of the machine-gun-toting nurses of New Beulah or the undead denizens of Highway 18. Or how about The Deacon and his giant, golden daggers carved from the paving stones of heaven? Or Zadkiel and his Black Host of Malakhim assassins? Or most importantly, wait until you see what's going on with… well, I better not talk about that one just yet.

It promises to be one helluva wild ride, filled with new villains and new challenges, plus a few familiar faces. Riding shotgun with me on this trip will be Roland Boschi, an artist who's new to the United States, but as you can see from his gorgeously gritty work in this very issue, he's already destined to make a name for himself here. Along with Dan Brown providing the wicked colors, Joe Caramagna laying down the slick letters and editor Aubrey Sitterson trying to keep us all from getting fired, we'll be bringing you your regular monthly dose of high-octane ass-kicking action and souped-up supernatural horror in the Mighty Marvel Manner you've come to know and love.

Just remember, Ghost Rider's an angel now.

But he's still not taking any $%@*.

-Jason
January, 2008

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